

The Australian National University



Centre for
Aboriginal
Economic
Policy
Research

Discussion Paper



**Aborigines, tourism and sustainable
development**

J.C. Altman and J. Finlayson

No.26/1992

ISSN 1036-1774
ISBN 0 7315 1424 6

SERIES NOTE

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- to identify and analyse the factors affecting Aboriginal participation in the labour force; and
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Jon Altman
Director, CAEPR
Australian National University

ABSTRACT

An issues paper on 'Aborigines and Tourism' was commissioned by the Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) Tourism Working Group on 3 June 1991. It followed a verbal presentation on Aboriginal issues to the ESD Tourism Working Group by the authors in May 1991. The paper is divided into three parts, as specified in consultancy terms of reference:

- i A review of research on the impacts of tourism on Aboriginal communities.
- ii An outline of the characteristics of an ecologically sustainable tourism industry in the context of the industry's interface with Aboriginal communities.
- iii A discussion of policy alternatives to achieve an ecologically sustainable tourism industry for Aboriginal communities.

The methodology for the issues paper required a search of the literature, with special reference to the consultants' own work on the impacts of tourism on Aboriginal communities in remote Australia (in Altman's case) and in rural and urban areas in south-east Australia (in Finlayson's case).

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Diane Smith for her substantive input, at very short notice, on the version of this paper that was produced as a consultancy report, and to Belinda Lim for her assistance in proof-reading. Linda Allen and Konstantin Probst assisted in formatting the consultancy report into the discussion paper format, and Anne Daly and Chris Burchett provided some helpful comments.

Dr Jon Altman is Director, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Faculty of Arts, Australian National University. Dr Julie Finlayson was affiliated with the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology (now Archaeology and Anthropology), Faculty of Arts, Australian National University, when she co-authored this paper.

Foreword

In May 1991, Julie Finlayson and I were invited by Professor David Throsby to make a presentation on Aboriginal cultural tourism to the ESD Working Group on Tourism. Subsequently, we were commissioned to undertake a brief consultancy for the Working Group. This consultancy was completed in June 1991. The Working Group's Final Report on Tourism, published by the Australian Government Publishing Service in November 1991, acknowledged its reliance on our report in its discussion of the impact of tourism on indigenous Australian communities.

The report is now being published in the CAEPR Discussion Paper Series for two reasons. First, when applied consultancy research is undertaken at CAEPR, a proviso for staff undertaking such work is that outcomes must be publicly available. Agreement was reached with the client that after the ESD Working Group's final report was published, our report could also be published. Second, interest in Aboriginal involvement in tourism has escalated in the past 12 months. For example, in June 1992, a national tourism strategy *Tourism: Australia's Passport to Growth* was launched with specific reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in the industry. Also in June 1992, the Second Stage Response of the Federal Government to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody targeted Aboriginal involvement in the tourism industry as an area for future development. With this growth in interest, we have had numerous requests for the report.

It should be noted that some material in the paper is becoming a little dated, although in terms of published material it is up to date. Lead times in academic research can be problematic, but there is little doubt that most of the broad issues addressed here remain current.

The discussion paper is almost identical to the consultancy report, the main differences being an update of references, where necessary, and alterations to layout to maintain compatibility with the CAEPR Discussion Paper series.

Jon Altman
Series Editor
August 1992

The impact of tourism on Aboriginal communities

In a chapter discussing the means of increasing economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the recent *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report* (Commonwealth of Australia 1991) identifies involvement in tourism as a potentially major source of economic growth for Aboriginal communities. It acknowledges that these opportunities are likely to have negative impacts on the quality of life in these communities and would therefore require careful management. The Royal Commission reviewed the literature and identified five principal areas of participation for Aboriginal people:

- i Employment: Employment opportunities exist in the tourism industry for Aboriginal people, both in service provision to tourists in the hospitality sector and in national parks.
- ii Investment: Aboriginal communities could invest in enterprises which service the tourist industry. A notable example is the Gagudju Association which holds sole equity in the Four Seasons Cooina Hotel and Four Seasons Crocodile Motel, both in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. Purchase of the property was financed by mining royalties, paid as 'areas affected' monies with respect to the Ranger Uranium Mine at Jabiru (see Altman 1988).
- iii The arts and crafts industry: In some Aboriginal communities indirect involvement in tourism is a preferred option. This is possible via the arts and crafts industry. A successful enterprise, such as the community-owned Maruku Arts and Crafts in Uluru National Park in the Northern Territory, is an exemplary model for this form of enterprise (see Altman 1989a). However, in general, Aboriginal participation in the arts and crafts industry has had varying commercial success. For the artists and their promoters a primary concern is whether to produce material for the fine art market or the tourist market (Altman 1990; Finlayson 1990). Funding bodies interpret the issue as a choice between culture or commerce and debate whether it is feasible or desirable to merge the two. The *Review of the Aboriginal Art and Craft Industry* (Altman 1989a) presented detailed discussion of various aspects of the issue (see also Altman and Taylor 1990).
- iv Cultural tours: The development of cultural tours has worked successfully in communities where enterprise centres on an individual or family group and is maintained as a small-scale operation. Ipolera Tours, based at a small outstation group in central Australia, illustrates how a small-scale, family-based commercial

venture can work successfully. But crucial to this success is the fact that the venture is a family rather than a community enterprise. In north Queensland, the Mossman Gorge Aboriginal community offers guided walking tours through the Gorge National Park. The tours are staffed only by those members of the community who wish to participate and who feel comfortable interacting with tourists. This keeps the enterprise informal and small-scale.

- v Joint ventures: Joint ventures in cultural tourism offer opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate jointly with non-Aborigines in the provision of goods and services to the tourism industry. This option has received little attention from government funding bodies and has met with some resistance from Aboriginal groups who are sensitive to issues of Aboriginal control. Oddly, this concern over equity and control is greater in enterprises which are privately funded than in contexts where governments finance projects with public money.

None of the five areas outlined in the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National Report* are unproblematic for Aboriginal participants. Employment in tourism-related industries requires a high level of literacy and communication skills and the adoption of cultural styles which are foreign and daunting. Factors like these limit employment opportunities for Aboriginal employees and inevitably confine their participation in the service industries to unskilled or semi-skilled work. Few Aboriginal employees in the hospitality sector of the tourism industry hold managerial positions. Participation in hospitality and other tourism-related services also demands direct and intensive social interaction with tourists which many Aboriginal people are unwilling or unable to undertake. In national parks, like Kakadu (Kesteven 1987) and Uluru (Altman 1987a), most Aboriginal people have avoided employment opportunities in tourism for reasons of this kind and have shown a definite preference for indirect economic participation in the industry, as is possible with manufacturing arts and crafts for retail sales (Altman 1989a). However, some more gregarious individuals have been willing to undertake both training and employment, especially for park ranger positions.

Other forms of Aboriginal participation in cultural tourism, such as bush food tours or camping trips, also require intense social interaction with tourists. Again, the interpersonal aspects of such involvement can be both uncomfortable and confronting experiences for many Aboriginal people (and probably for many tourists). But in some communities this problem is overcome by self-selection, where Aboriginal volunteers, with a more outgoing personality, staff such 'inter-cultural' enterprises. Alternatively,

enterprises may draw on a pool of staff who are willing to work on casual terms, a basis more appropriate to their personal requirements.

In situations where Aboriginal cultural enterprises cater to specialised consumer markets within the tourism industry, it is possible for service provision to be more flexible. Such flexibility can be an advantage. However, all Aboriginal enterprises need to be familiar with the structure and demands of the tourism industry in order to successfully market their product. In north Queensland, residents of the Mossman Gorge community retain their individual style of presentation and low-key interaction with tourists, while their non-Aboriginal partners, Australian Pacific Tours, market bush tours as an option in a range of day trips by bus through the district.

Some studies of Aboriginal tourism highlight specific impacts of tourism on Aboriginal communities. For example, the impact of tourism on the natural environment is often linked to concerns about Aboriginal heritage protection with respect to sites of religious, historical and archaeological significance (Sullivan 1984; Gale and Jacobs 1987). The Industries Commission (1989) published proceedings of a seminar on the environmental impacts of travel and tourism. Ecological perspectives recognise the potential for tourism to diminish the quality of life in Aboriginal communities. Assessments often focus on environmental impacts that negatively affect traditional economic activities, such as hunting and gathering, and how such negative effects might, in turn, affect the cultural fabric of Aboriginal community life. Dillon (1987) argues that if Aboriginality is viewed as a tradable commodity, this might provide grounds for financial compensation when cultural impacts impinge on Aboriginal identity and lifestyle.

In practice, it is important to recognise that all domains of Aboriginal life and the diverse impacts of tourism are neither discrete nor easily separated from one another, even for analytical purposes. Furthermore, research indicates that impacts vary from case to case. Nevertheless, some general points of relevance in both remote and urban contexts can be made.

The evidence from case studies

The following case studies identify areas in which tourism has an impact on Aboriginal people in both remote and urban areas. However, the impact of tourism on Aboriginal communities is under-researched and these few case studies, unfortunately, represent the full range of published material readily available.

White (1986) compiled an annotated bibliography of literature on the social, economic and cultural impact of tourism on Aboriginal people.

The work was commissioned for the East Kimberley Impact Assessment Project, but refers to comparative studies of the impact of tourism on indigenous people elsewhere. However, the bibliography lacks any critical assessment of the research and ignores discussion of the potential for tourism to provide Aboriginal communities with a sustainable economic base. It is also somewhat dated; most of the material referred to in this paper has been published since 1986.

Altman's (1987a) research with the Mutitjulu community at Uluru in the Northern Territory indicates that although community members own the land that comprises a major tourist destination (Uluru National Park), they do not gain any substantial direct economic benefits either from employment or increased income. In fact, it is non-Aboriginal people who are primarily involved in the industry and subsequently accrue the benefits. He highlights the importance of structuring lease agreements in national parks to the economic advantage of Aboriginal landowners, and the provision of special concessionary clauses that would enable landowners, or local Aboriginal residents, to expand their commercial enterprises in a manner that is appropriate to their requirements.

In a major comparative study of Aboriginal participation in tourism on Aboriginal-owned land in remote areas, Altman (1988) reviewed cultural tourism in Uluru, Kakadu and Gurig National Parks and at Melville and Bathurst Islands. He found that while Aboriginal people were principally involved in indirect cultural tourism through the manufacture and sale of artefacts, major Federal Government funding bodies provided only limited financial assistance for establishing these industries. Nor did the Northern Territory Government support any of these communities with substantial funding. Consequently, Aboriginal manufacturing enterprises were small-scale, but remained dependent on financial support from cultural funding agencies like the Australia Council. Income from the sale of artefacts amounted to little more than a cash supplement to welfare, largely because marketing was not undertaken at the place of production. In any case, Aboriginal producers frequently received only a minor share of the final retail price, reflecting the remoteness of these producers from the market, and associated problems, and the operation of standard pricing practice in the arts.

Altman's case studies showed that Aboriginal people were reluctant to participate in forms of direct tourism, as they felt involvement with non-Aborigines was inevitably intrusive and negative. Moreover, Aboriginal people felt it was neither important nor necessary to participate in the formal labour market. Such views give precedence to sociocultural values ahead of commercial considerations. Altman's comparative research indicates that assumptions that tourism can create employment in areas of high Aboriginal unemployment are questionable. Indeed, it is evident that

employment opportunities are not embraced by the communities as expected. Altman concludes, moreover, that the supply of and demand for cultural tourism is not always compatible.

Altman suggests that Aboriginal ownership of major tourist destinations provides no guarantee of economic opportunities for Aboriginal people. In fact, he estimates that Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory only receive between 1 and 2 per cent of total tourist expenditure, yet Aboriginal people compromise 22 per cent of the population and own about 34 per cent of the Northern Territory land base.

Altman notes that land rights law guarantees Aboriginal communities affected by mining on their land a share of mineral rent, paid as de facto compensation for environmental detriment to Aboriginal lands and to offset negative sociocultural impacts. Tourism on Aboriginal land offers no such guarantees of income. Lease arrangements could provide substantial income from tourism without direct participation, in situations where Aboriginal people own major tourism destinations. For example, a recently renegotiated rental agreement between the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Northern Land Council could see traditional owners of Kakadu National Park receive between \$350,000 and \$450,000 per annum (Altman and Smith 1990: 52). At Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park traditional owners receive \$100,000 rental per annum, plus 50 per cent of any revenue from commercial concessions within the Park (ibid.). At other locations, like Uluru National Park and Gurig (Cobourg Peninsula) National Park, Aboriginal people also receive returns based on rentals and tourist numbers (Altman 1988).

In a related study, Altman (1989b) examined the economic impact of tourism on the above-mentioned tourist destinations. Four indicators, employment levels, successful enterprises, levels of artefact sales, and the sale of hunting and ritual culture were examined. He notes that governments are increasingly encouraging Aboriginal communities to participate in tourism as a means of reducing welfare dependency. Yet in the national parks under Aboriginal ownership and lease-back agreements, traditional owners have gained limited economic advantages from commercial concessions or through land rental payments. He suggests that benefits might be more substantial if traditional owners had leasing agreements in place prior to tourism growth, and differentiates between situations where tourism is invited and where Aboriginal interests can veto visitation, and situations where tourism is imposed, usually as a condition of a land grant.

In another examination of tourism impacts in a remote Aboriginal community, Altman (1987b) discusses how the Warmun (Turkey Creek) community in the East Kimberly might lessen their economic dependence on welfare through tourism enterprises. The community is well-placed geographically to take advantage of tourism in the region. Furthermore, the community has some equity (a 40 per cent share) in the local Turkey Creek roadhouse close to the (then proposed) Purnululu (Bungle Bungle) National Park. Once Purnululu National Park is established, the community could extend their commercial options. However, he concludes that ultimately, despite commercial opportunities and locational advantage, like other Aboriginal communities participating in tourism, commercial opportunities are likely to be limited by a cultural priority for social outcomes that may be incompatible with commercial development. Most employment opportunities in the tourism industry are unsuited to Aboriginal participation. Even with a number of structural advantages, economic benefits may not accrue to Aboriginal interests, and if they do, they may be offset by related social and cultural costs.

Finlayson's study (1991) of Aboriginal tourism in rural and urban areas in the more settled parts of Australia reinforces many points about the impact of tourism identified by Altman's research in remote areas. For example, at Lake Condah in Victoria the lack of socioeconomic benefits to Aboriginal landowners concurs with the findings for Aboriginal land owners in remote communities. She suggests that Aboriginal landowners participating in tourism in rural and urban Australia are missing out on economic opportunities in the tourism industry. Thus the Kerrup-jmara people, who own the former mission lands around Lake Condah, have little voice in the management of the present tourist venture on the property. Nor do they formally participate in decisions about the use of their land. The present tourism venture is run by the Victorian Tourism Commission (VTC) under a two-year lease agreement with the Aboriginal landowners. While the agreement specifies employment of Aboriginal people, there is no commitment to employ local Kerrup-jmara people or to establish local commercial projects which could be funded from the lease rent. This raises the important issue of Aboriginalisation (employing Aboriginal people) versus localisation (employing local Aboriginal people). Many of the local Kerrup-jmara people were ignorant of the leasing agreement and surprised that they now need the prior permission of the VTC if they wish to visit the area for recreation purposes. Projects of this kind use Aboriginal culture to promote tourism in general, but exclude local Aboriginal landowners from any economic benefits associated with the enterprise, and even more importantly, exclude them from control over activities on their own land.

Dillon (1987) argues that once Aboriginality is marketable it is also exploitable, and as a fragile resource it needs protection in the market

place. Otherwise it becomes vulnerable to oversimplification to make it palatable and comprehensible to tourists. A feature of Aboriginal culture is its variation across the continent, but such pressure can homogenise these variations and result in their compliance with cultural stereotypes. Dillon advocates further research to establish the various impacts of tourism on Aboriginal cultures. An additional point in this argument is that since Aboriginality is a limited resource, this may be a basis for compensation claims where cultural loss is a consequence of tourism. Dillon supports the argument, advanced by Altman and others, that Aboriginal ownership of land should be the leverage that allows Aboriginal interests to extract a share of the tourism rent generated by businesses that provide goods and services to visitors.

Research, based on questionnaires and survey methods, has attempted to quantify the importance and value of Aboriginal cultural tourism to the consumer (Central Land Council et al. (CLC) 1991; Spring 1990; Finlayson 1991). Gillespie (1988) examined tourism growth in Kakadu and its associated impact on the Aboriginal residents of the Park and confirmed the findings of other researchers; namely, that Aboriginal landowners should be able to develop commercial ventures to capitalise on concessions provided, owing to their statutory ownership of popular tourist destinations.

Sustainable tourism participation for Aboriginal societies

This section highlights characteristics of an ecologically sustainable tourism industry with reference to successful examples of Aboriginal participation in tourism. The term ecological sustainability has no uncontested definition, as noted by the Resource Assessment Commission (1991: 22-32). A broad notion of sustainability is used here that encompasses ecological, economic and cultural parameters. The economic and cultural components of sustainability are of particular interest with respect to Aboriginal participation in the industry. The former requires a longer-term Aboriginal commitment to maintaining economically viable tourism ventures. The latter is often taken to refer to development that does not erode the integrity of the cultural product that is being marketed in the longer term (Altman 1989a: 96; Resource Assessment Commission 1991: 30).

The ecological, economic and cultural components of sustainability are obviously highly interdependent, and it is impossible to treat these components independently, even for analytical purposes.

The diversity of Aboriginal experience in the tourism industry reflects, in part, the heterogeneity of Aboriginal societies across Australia. This

means that factors that contribute to sustainability in some contexts will not necessarily be applicable in others. Consequently, it is difficult to devise general role models for Aboriginal tourism enterprises. Furthermore, Aboriginal participation in tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon. Owing to the short-term nature of Aboriginal participation and the paucity of historical data, it is difficult to make future predictions about sustainability.

Sustainability will require the achievement of a balance between three variables: commercial success (with limits placed on commercialism); the resilience of cultural integrity and social cohesion; and the maintenance of the physical environment. The need for such a balance is universal and is not just limited to Aboriginal participation in tourism.

The following broad range of factors appear to be important prerequisites for successful and sustainable Aboriginal participation in tourism. These are: Aboriginal control, market realism for Aboriginal participants, appropriate corporate structures, appropriate scale of enterprise, accommodation of cultural and social factors, educating the industry and consumers, and realistic subvention.

Aboriginal control

Altman (1989b) makes a key distinction between situations where tourism is invited and those where it is imposed. In the former case, Aboriginal people are the landowners and have a right to restrict visitation onto their land. In the latter, Aboriginal people may be the landowners, but transfer of ownership has either been conditional on unrestricted tourism access or else has occurred after large-scale tourist visitation has already been established. Examples of the former are Melville and Bathurst Islands and Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory; the latter include major destinations like Uluru, Kakadu and Nitmiluk National Parks.

There is some correlation between invited and imposed tourism and direct and indirect industry participation. Kesteven (1987) found the Aboriginal residents of Kakadu National Park were not keen to participate in local tourism and were generally unhappy about the presence of tourists in the Park. Although the Aboriginal community were aware of the potential economic benefits of tourism, it contributed only a small amount to Aboriginal household income. With a continuing reluctance by Aboriginal people to be directly involved in tourism, Kesteven argues that Aboriginal economic interests would be better served through ownership and control of the tourism infrastructure. On Melville Island, on the other hand, Aboriginal people residing at Pularumpi regularly participate in bush tucker tours provided at a safari camp at Putjamirra.

There is a growing trend for Aboriginal people to be involved in the control of tourism on their land. For example, Uluru, Kakadu, Gurig and Nitmiluk National Parks all have boards of management with Aboriginal majorities. Aboriginal people have direct input into decision-making about tourist visitation, land use, the restriction of access to sensitive areas, and so on, through these formal structures. Aboriginal participation in decision-making allows them to monitor and exercise important controls on the pace of development.

Market realism for Aboriginal participants

Professional market research and the resulting information about tourism demand is essential for any commercially successful tourism venture. When the Tjapukai Dance Theatre was established in Kuranda, it aimed to find a niche in the regional tourism industry. It has been successful for a number of reasons, including attention to product detail and familiarity (after research) with the needs and expectations of the international and domestic tourist market. The joint venture received no financial assistance from any government funding bodies. Nevertheless, it is commercially successful and offers those Kuranda Aboriginal men who are employed as dancers valued, prestigious and full-time employment (see Finlayson 1991). None of these options previously existed for Aboriginal people, despite Kuranda's tourism boom.

Government funding bodies often pay insufficient attention to the quality of commissioned market research when assessing the commercial potential of an Aboriginal tourism venture. Such oversight is often compounded by a lack of clarity about the precise objectives for establishing the enterprise. In most cases it is neither clear to the community nor the funding body whether tourism is intended to provide an economic opportunity for a community, or whether it is an enterprise serving other social and cultural priorities. At times it is unspecified whether an enterprise is economic, social or culturally oriented. Without clarification of such diverse objectives, some of which may be incompatible, commercial success is extremely difficult to achieve and communities remain unclear about commercial reality.

At times, when market research has been utilised to establish government-funded projects, such as the Warrama Living Cultural Centre in Cairns, an artificially inflated estimate of the project's potential may occur. In some cases this is due to an overestimation of what the consumer will pay in a competitive market. In other situations, like the Eva Valley project near Katherine in the Northern Territory (see Altman and Smith 1990: 53-6), visitor numbers are overestimated by commissioned consultants. A realistic assessment of the product's value in the market is especially important in urban contexts where Aboriginal cultural enterprises compete with other tourism enterprises for the tourist dollar and enjoy

no, or very limited, commercial concessions. There are indications, for example, that projected visitor numbers to the Tandanya Cultural Centre in Adelaide were gross overestimates. Such overestimates cause the additional problem that the lead times needed for project viability are underestimated and Aboriginal participants and funding agencies expect returns on investment too early.

Market research must identify the potential segment of the market for a particular cultural product. Thus in Victoria, the Lake Condah project is designed to appeal to special interest groups, such as history students or human geographers. At Eva Valley, there was a focus on special interest groups, like ornithologists from Europe. The Northern Territory Tourist Commission now promotes a range of experiences in Aboriginal cultural tourism on the basis of catering for the diversity of interests and needs amongst tourists (Burchett 1991).

On the other hand, interest in Aboriginal culture is not a prerequisite for Aboriginal financial benefit. At major tourist destinations, such as Uluru and Kakadu National Parks, Aboriginal people will benefit financially, owing to the impost of visitor fees for entry onto their lands, despite the fact that many tourists visit such areas for environmental rather than cultural tourism.

Many Aboriginal communities have unrealistic expectations of the economic benefits of tourism which are often fuelled by over-optimistic consultants' reports and unrealistic bureaucratic desire to view tourism as a means of getting Aboriginal people off welfare. At times, there is also a lack of understanding about the extent of environmental or socioeconomic costs involved in achieving a commercially successful outcome. When communities have access to realistic information they demonstrate that they are capable of making decisions about these matters. For example, the Mutitjulu community at Uluru National Park chose to close off tourist access to the community store and service station to limit the social impact of tourism on the community. This decision was made with full knowledge of associated financial costs to the community (see Altman 1987a).

Appropriate corporate structures

It is common Federal Government practice to fund tourism projects as community enterprises on the questionable assumption that communities are homogeneous social groups. In reality, Aboriginal communities are often divided, with community factions having different views about economic development options. Community representative organisations frequently face a difficult trade-off between pleasing their government sponsors and meeting the needs of their Aboriginal constituents (Sullivan 1987; Smith 1990). The dilemma for community organisations is that

both sponsor and constituents have different, even contrary, notions of the obligations owed by the organisation. Moreover, a bureaucratic vision of commercial success may be at odds with a community's priority for social, as well as commercial outcomes.

There is a growing concern that sponsoring commercial enterprises via community councils may be inappropriate. Councils are frequently incorporated bodies that aim to provide municipal services to community residents. It is likely that Aboriginal entrepreneurs who wish to establish tourism ventures will not receive the right incentives or signals if their businesses are controlled by communities (Altman 1988: 313-6).

Ironically, some of the few examples of commercial success in Aboriginal cultural tourism are joint ventures between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal partners. However, equity is a sensitive issue in funding Aboriginal tourism enterprises. Thus, despite the commercial success of the Tjapukai Dance Theatre in Kuranda, there are strong objections on ideological grounds from other Aboriginal groups to such business partnerships (see Finlayson 1991). Furthermore, government funding agencies, such as the Aboriginal Arts Unit of the Australia Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, generally oppose joint commercial ventures with non-Aboriginal equity.

In contrast to many government-funded Aboriginal tourism ventures, joint ventures between Aboriginal people and non-Aborigines are often preceded by thorough market research and a hard-headed attitude to product development and retailing. The Tjapukai Dance Theatre in Kuranda is one such joint venture. Another reason for the Theatre's success as a joint venture is that it operates on the basis of division of labour by specialisation: Aboriginal men focus on their speciality as dancers, and the non-Aboriginal partners concentrate on financial and other management.

As noted above, the potential for Aboriginal communities to be effective entrepreneurs depends on greater knowledge and education about the tourist industry and consumer expectations. In some cases, joint ventures between Aboriginal entrepreneurs and a regular tour operator have provided the context for such education. The joint venture between Mossman Gorge community and Australian Pacific Tours in north Queensland has been such a symbiotic commercial relationship. The company explains tourist expectations to the Aboriginal entrepreneurs and establishes the kind of structures Aboriginal people must utilise to adapt their cultural product to the requirements of the industry.

An added advantage of joint ventures is that they seem to have a greater ability to attract private sector finance. This provides an important

alternative source of financial support for economic development to that now almost exclusively provided by the state. Both the Tjapukai Dance Theatre and the Jabiru Cabaret restaurant in Cairns are successful examples of joint ventures established with private sector investment. The relationship between Aboriginal people and Europeans in both ventures has followed a management style which is familial, informal and promotes social, as well as professional interaction.

Accommodating cultural and social factors

The tourism industry is first and foremost a demanding service industry. Despite significant variations across Australia, there is little doubt that Aboriginal people are at a distinct disadvantage in providing many of the service requirements of this industry. Such disadvantage in the industry is partly caused by the lower educational status of Aboriginal people and their lower proficiency in English. Tesfaghiorghis (1991: 12-3) shows how lack of English proficiency is especially evident in remote and rural locations, precisely the regions that are attracting growing numbers of tourists. The communication and inter-cultural problems between Aboriginal people and visitors provides a partial explanation for Aboriginal preference for indirect tourism that requires no direct contact with tourists.

In many remote areas, Aboriginal cultural practices are maintained. For example, one finds that many Aboriginal people are extremely mobile within a defined and wide-ranging social universe and place a high value on participation in ceremonial activity. Such priorities may not match the expectations of the tourism industry for regularity, punctuality and hospitality. The conundrum is that those tourists who are attracted by the authenticity of Aboriginal culture frequently overlook that its maintenance is often dependent on a degree of flexibility that does not make it very marketable.

The accommodation of cultural factors means that the provision of services by Aboriginal people often needs to be on a flexible and unregimented basis. Seasonal factors may also influence the availability of Aboriginal people for employment on cultural tours. Similarly, to sustain Aboriginal cultural practices may require that visitors be excluded from culturally or economically significant areas.

Scale of operations

Commercial tourism enterprises which successfully generate income are often small-scale and family-based. Examples of such enterprises are the Ipolera outstation venture in central Australia and a family-based artefact business at Omeo in Gippsland, Victoria. As noted above, there is growing evidence that tourism enterprises undertaken by communities lack the appropriate incentive structures for participants; even if

successful, distribution of profits across the community results in limited returns to individuals and families.

On the other hand, successful family-based enterprises can result in significant intra-community income differentials. Such differentials will have associated cultural impacts. As the Resource Assessment Commission (1991: 22-32) notes in its discussion of sustainability, developments should allow an equitable distribution of the return on exploited resources, be these environmental or cultural. Such equitable distribution may require a long-term perspective that pays attention to the rights of future generations.

It is generally the case that Aboriginal cultural tours that enable meaningful interaction between Aboriginal people and tourists must be relatively small-scale. For example, almost all popular cultural tours, like Bill Harney's Jankangyina Tours in the Katherine region, or the Liru bush tucker walks at Uluru, are limited to a handful of clients on each excursion. Some types of cultural tours, and in particular bush tucker tours where visitors eat indigenous species, must be limited in scale if species degradation is to be avoided.

Industry and consumer education

The lack of market realism of many potential and actual Aboriginal participants in the tourism industry is matched at times by lack of understanding about Aboriginal cultural practices by both industry interests and consumers (tourists). For example, one frequently hears tourists lament the lack of bark paintings or didgeridoos for sale in central Australia. If there is a genuine market demand for Aboriginal cultural tourism, then it is important that both tour operators and tourists have some accurate knowledge and understanding of the culture they are about to experience. There is fairly widespread ignorance of the diversity of Aboriginal regional and material cultures. In some cases, Aboriginal culture is presented by tour operators in an extremely inaccurate and offensive manner (see CLC et al. 1991).

Some Aboriginal cultural enterprises set out to educate other industry participants and tourists about regional Aboriginal cultures. This may be done formally in the context of a cultural centre, or informally by the provision of educative promotional material. One of the marketing strategies of Maruku Arts and Crafts at Uluru has been to always emphasise the authenticity of artefacts sold and to reinforce this strategy with strict quality control.

Realistic subvention

One of the key findings of the Federal Government sponsored review of the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry undertaken in 1989 (Altman 1989a) was that while the industry was culturally sustainable, it was not economically sustainable without ongoing government subvention. Such subvention is not unusual in the production of cultural goods and services. A key feature of the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry is that with limited support, employment opportunities could be provided to many producers living in remote areas where alternative employment opportunities are non-existent. Furthermore, it was argued that ongoing subvention of the industry generated wider economic and social benefits both to the Australian tourism industry and to the Australian and international communities.

The reasons why the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry requires ongoing support are not associated with any inherent inefficiencies in the industry, but result from the locational and structural barriers faced by producers. Consequently, intermediary marketing organisations, which are invariably community-controlled, are needed. Subsidy is usually required to cover the operating costs of these organisations. Importantly though, ongoing support, most of which is currently provided by the Aboriginal Arts Unit of the Australia Council, allows Aboriginal producers a degree of insulation from unwelcome market signals that could erode the cultural integrity of products. For example, in central Australia there are frequent requests for spears that are easily portable, and in north Australia requests are made for suitcase-sized bark paintings. Government arts funding support insulates producers from the pressure to meet such culturally degrading demands. Realistic subvention can result in both cultural and economic sustainability.

Realistic support can ensure that Aboriginal tourism enterprises can stand alone before subsidies are withdrawn. For example, the review of the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry found that many Aboriginal manufacturing enterprises had been established to cater for the tourist industry. Initial establishment support had been provided to cover capital requirements, training and wage subsidies for periods of up to 12 months. However, once a product was available for sale, little follow-up support was provided for promotion and marketing. The key point here is that if subsidy is provided, it should be at a level that will allow enterprises to be established and developed to a stage of commercial sustainability, otherwise the provision of financial assistance is wasted.

Policy alternatives for sustainable Aboriginal tourism participation

The analysis of some of the factors that are needed to ensure sustainable Aboriginal participation in the tourism industry presented above suggests the need for new policy directions.

Recognising diversity

An ecologically sustainable tourism industry for Aboriginal people must take account of Aboriginal cultural diversity and their differing preferences for involvement in tourism. Some Aboriginal communities want to limit their involvement in tourism to a part-time activity, providing just enough supplementary income to lessen total dependence on the welfare state. Altman documented this preference in the Aboriginal arts and crafts industry and termed it 'alternative tourism' (Altman 1989a).

Aboriginal participation in the tourist industry will differ for each community, depending on their particular circumstances and the requirements of the chosen enterprises. This suggests that realistically, policy needs to be flexible to accommodate such diversity. Indeed, a hallmark of the major Federal Government initiative for Aboriginal economic development, the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) (Australian Government 1987) is its wide range of programs to suit varying situations. However, the AEDP is somewhat limited by its unrealistic overall targets that aim to achieve economic equality between Aboriginal and other Australians by the year 2000. There is a need for the AEDP to recognise that some Aboriginal people may only seek part-time, occasional or seasonal participation in the tourism industry, and that such a level of participation may be necessary for the cultural sustainability of Aboriginal tourism ventures.

Broadening the options

The structural nature of Aboriginal involvement in the tourism industry is important. Questions of interest on this point concern Aboriginal equity in commercial tourism projects. Are joint ventures between Aboriginal communities and private investors possible or desirable? What provisions do Aboriginal people have for control of tourism development, especially on their own land? Where tourism takes place on Aboriginal land, what provision is there for equity in management and commercial advantage? Research by Altman (1987a; 1988; 1989b), Finlayson (1991) and Gillespie (1988) suggests that Aboriginal landownership is no guarantee of substantial financial return from commercial enterprises.

The results of Finlayson's (1991) research indicate that joint ventures may be the most economically sustainable, but there are currently no government programs that facilitate or monitor such joint ventures.

Rigorous market research

Initial market research that assesses the potential viability of Aboriginal tourism enterprises must be rigorous. Attention must be paid to the diversity of the consumer market. Tourists are neither a homogeneous group nor do all international visitors necessarily have the same leisure interests as domestic visitors; and, of course, age, education, gender, ethnicity, and income are further sources of consumer diversity (see Altman 1989b; Finlayson 1990; Spring 1990; Burchett 1991).

Lack of rigorous market research has frequently led to unrealistic expectations about the potential demand for Aboriginal tourism ventures and unrealistic estimates of what the market will pay for Aboriginal cultural products. One outcome of such neglect, given the public funds involved, is an increased community dependence on long-term government financial sponsorship which prolongs Aboriginal welfare dependency even where opportunities may exist. Another outcome is the subsequent failure of enterprises, with the associated negative repercussions.

There are indications that many consultants engaged to assess the viability of proposals for Aboriginal commercial participation in tourism are excessively optimistic. Such optimism may be due to ideological commitment to Aboriginal participation in tourism, especially on Aboriginal land, or else to implicit or explicit pressure from funding bodies to present positive assessments, given the costs involved in commissioning market research. It is imperative that market research undertaken for Aboriginal communities provides a realistic appraisal of proposals so that they can be used by Aboriginal people to make informed decisions. All too often, participation in tourism is presented to Aboriginal communities as a Hobson's choice: a choice between tourism and poverty.

Industry and policy realism

Case studies show that Aboriginal communities respond in different ways to the impact of tourism. A good deal is now known about the benefits and limitations of Aboriginal involvement in the arts and crafts industry and the structural arrangements which are necessary to operate Aboriginal enterprises in this sector (see Altman 1989a; Altman and Taylor 1990). However, other areas of Aboriginal involvement in tourism are not so well documented.

There is no comprehensive or critical review of other cultural tourism ventures, such as the many Aboriginal cultural centres financed by governments in urban and rural towns. At least one consultant claims that Aboriginal cultural tourism has a potentially significant future role as an avenue for economic development in both remote and urban communities (Parsons 1991).

Altman (1991) disagrees with such optimism. He suggests that while Aboriginal involvement is predicated on government sponsorship and continuing financial subvention, economic independence is impossible. Clearly, more research on the long-term viability of Aboriginal cultural tourism is essential for a critical evaluation of its economic sustainability.

Education and training

Tourism training programs must be relevant to the needs of Aboriginal clientele. A first step in this direction is a critical review of existing training programs. Such a review has been undertaken with respect to the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP). It is also necessary to establish a realistic training needs-based assessment of areas in tourism where Aboriginal people can effectively participate. Training must also inform both Aboriginal communities and individuals about consumer demands and the possible cultural impact of tourism in their communities.

It is often difficult for Aboriginal people to imagine the extent and range of tourism impacts on their communities. It is important, therefore, that where possible, Aboriginal people take advantage of opportunities under TAP for work information tours that can familiarise aspiring participants in the industry with the experiences of other Aboriginal communities and enterprises. It is currently possible, for example, for Aboriginal people to visit areas and enterprises already engaged in tourism to assess socioeconomic impacts first hand.

Whatever form of education for participation in the industry is adopted, it is important to familiarise Aboriginal communities with both visitor and industry expectations. Williams (1989) suggests that such learning is best facilitated in contexts of informed discussion between Aboriginal people actually involved in tourism enterprises or with joint park management arrangements. These contexts create opportunities for people to realistically assess their own aspirations for involvement in tourism.

Further research requirements

Some sections of the tourism market are concerned with marketing 'authentic' Aboriginal culture to tourists without any real understanding of what this concept means or the impact that such provision may have on Aboriginal hosts. Dillon (1987) comments on the impact of contact between tourists and Aboriginal groups and the degeneration of cultural

authenticity which can result. Parsons (1991) writes of the 'clash of authenticities' between hosts and guests in cultural contact. More research should be directed towards seeking an understanding of what tourists expect from Aboriginal cultural tourism and what Aboriginal people expect from tourists. There is only one study in this area, and this is not widely available (CLC et al. 1991); it provides an important model for future research. The Australia Council has provided some preliminary research on tourist expectations with a survey of international visitors and their interest in Aboriginal culture (Spring 1990). Finlayson (1991) also used questionnaires to elicit tourists' responses to Aboriginal tourism ventures in the Cairns region.

More research on the socioeconomic effects of tourism on Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal culture is required to understand the full impact of tourism and to document the long-term viability of tourism ventures. Opinions vary about the effectiveness of tourism as an opportunity for economic independence for Aboriginal people (Altman 1989b, 1991; versus Parsons 1991) and this diversity of opinion must be tested with up-to-date research.

Concluding comment

As a general observation it can be stated that the demands of the tourism industry and the supply of goods and services by Aboriginal people are often incompatible. Aboriginal people have not, as a general rule, integrated into the mainstream economy, and tourism, as a service industry, makes rigid demands of industry participants. However, there are obvious spin-offs to both the industry and Aboriginal people from fuller Aboriginal participation. It must be recognised, though, that Aboriginal involvement in the industry in the immediate future is likely to be fairly small-scale, informal and indirect. The economic viability of much Aboriginal participation in the tourist industry will probably require public subvention for some time. The cultural sustainability of Aboriginal participation will be largely dependent on Aboriginal control of the extent and nature of such participation. It is imperative that any government initiatives for Aboriginal participation recognise the fragility of the Aboriginal cultural product so that undue pressure is not placed on Aboriginal suppliers of cultural tourism to meet the needs of the tourism market. The sustainability of Aboriginal cultural tourism will be largely dependent on an appropriately slow rate of development that can best be described as tourism realism.

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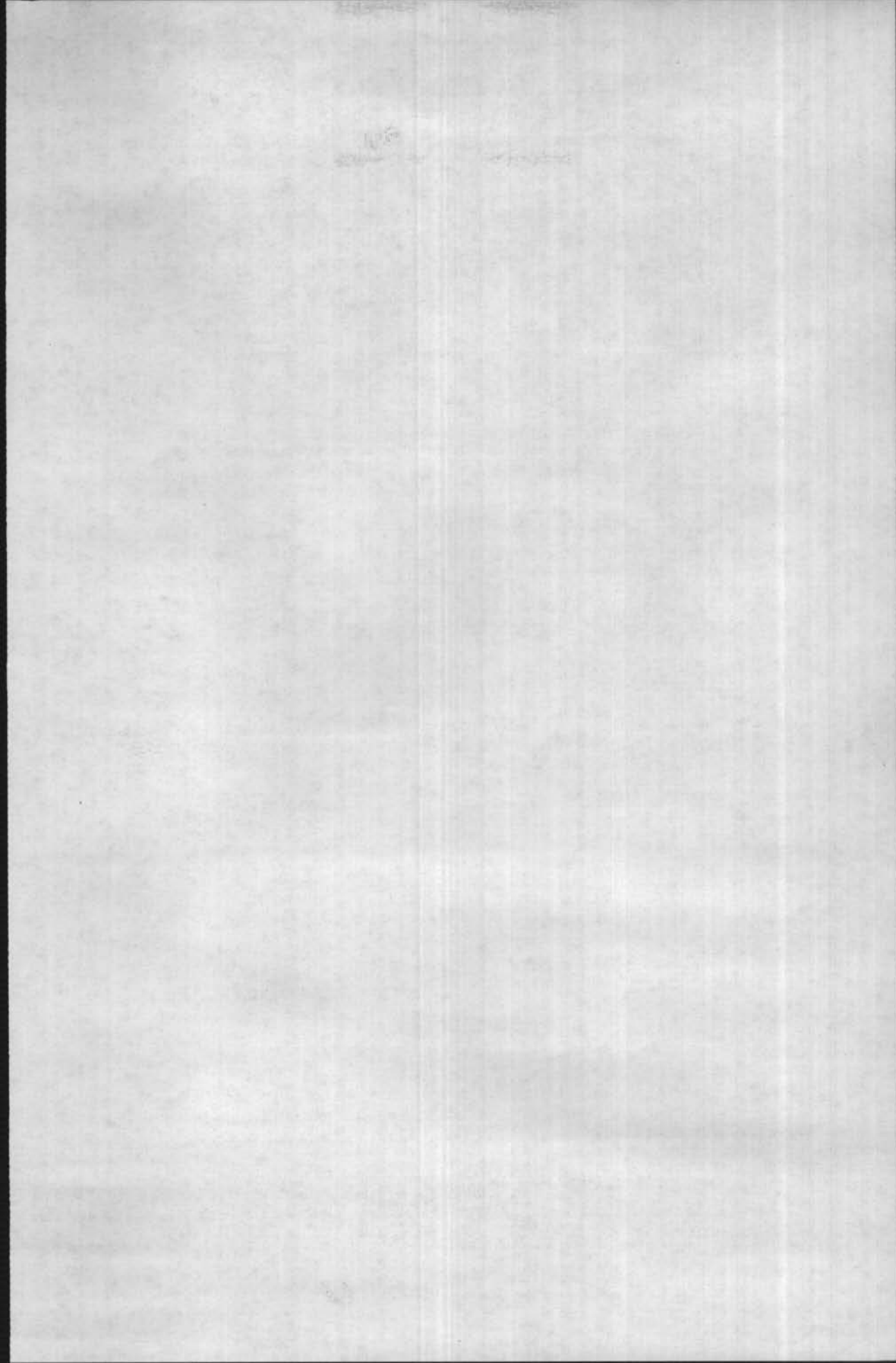
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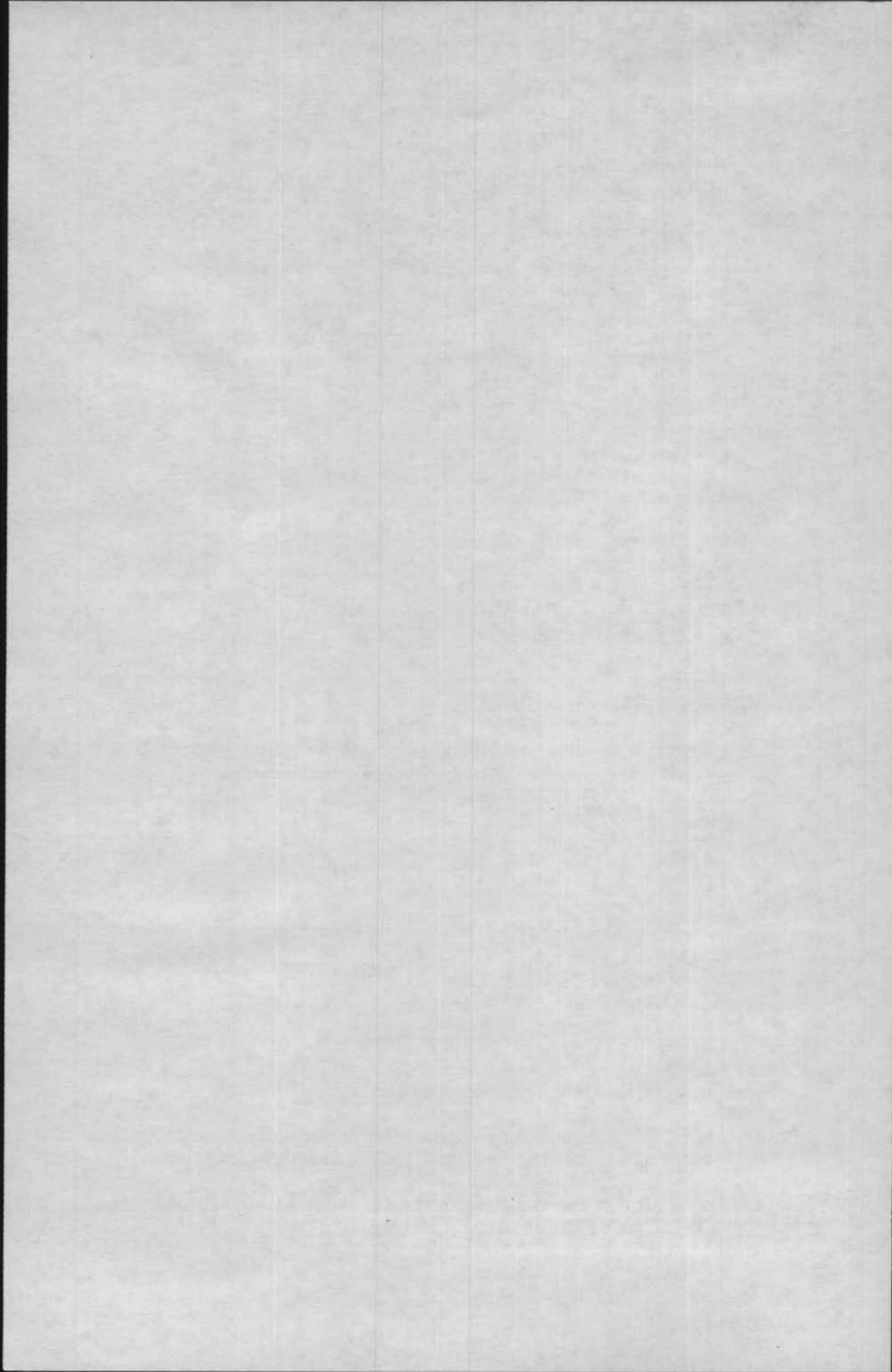
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